



A HISTORY OF THE TANDEM CLUB – CHAPTER 1

During 2021, our 50th year, we plan to publish here a series of articles to tell the story of the Club from its beginnings. Contributions have come in from many current and former members. We try to name them all and thank them, and we apologise if we have left anyone out. If you have stories or photographs about the Club and tandeming from the last 50 years please send them into the Editor.



A club for people who ride tandems; how did it all start?

The following letter appeared in the Feb – March 1971 issue of Cycle Touring (the magazine of the Cycling Touring Club – CTC – aka Cycling UK):

A Tandem Association?

ABOUT 18 months ago I bought a couple of tandems, one not in working order, the other fully operational. To keep the machines reliable and in sound condition, various replacements and spares were needed. I expected some difficulty, but soon found that my task was beset with many unforeseen problems. A few bottom-bracket axles and cups seem to be available, but the chance of obtaining the exact type required is slight. Other items, too, are scarce, especially for tandems not using standard solo equipment (which in any case many users have found of too light a construction). Enquiries suggest that turned parts such as axles can be produced reasonably cheaply—the larger the quantity, the cheaper—and it is likely that other components could be made especially if a number could be ordered. With these thoughts in mind, it seems to me that those who still ride tandems ought to organize themselves into a Tandem Association, the main objects of which would be to produce, or encourage the production of, parts, and to share information and experiences. I would therefore be pleased to receive views and ideas from those members who have been writing about tandeming in Cycletouring during the past year, and anyone else interested in helping to form such an association. Ideas from the trade would be welcome.

Don Journet

1971 was a low point for cycling. Most new bikes were for children (remember the Raleigh Chopper?) Commuting was by car, the mountain bike had yet to be invented and few adults chose to ride for recreation. The tandem was obsolete; perhaps your grandparents had one before the war if they couldn't afford a car. No major bicycle manufacturer offered a tandem in their range.

Don Journet's letter was followed by the following announcement in the Dec 1971 – Jan 1972 issue:

Tandem Club formed

SEVENTEEN cyclists, all CTC members, met in the Cotswold village of Charlbury on October 9 and formed the Tandem Club. The idea arose from correspondence in Cycletouring, and the meeting was the culmination of nine months' work collecting information from tandem riders as far apart as New York, London, Northern Ireland, Edinburgh and South Africa. During this time tandem accessories have been manufactured in small quantities to test the feasibility of supplying members' needs. Among the items so far produced are bottom bracket axles and cups, tandem hub spindles and cones, all reasonably priced and of good quality. Chairman of the new Tandem Club is Don Journet of Hornchurch (recently elected a member of the CTC National Council for 1972), R. J. Keane of Welling is secretary, and subscriptions (£1) and enquiries regarding membership are being dealt with by the treasurer, L. J. Duffin, 12 Mariam Gardens, Hornchurch, Essex.

This meeting in October 1971 marks the start of the Tandem Club.

The Club was really the brain-child of members of the Essex DA of the CTC, particularly Don Journet and Len Duffin. After its formation Essex members continued to do much to support the TC, especially The Tandem Club Journal, first produced in January 1972. All the early issues were typed by Ronnie (Veronica) Brown and the Gestetner copies were produced, collated, stapled and posted by Essex members. The TC Handbook was first produced in 1977 and is now part of the Club's website.

The Club's "Rules and Constitution" were finally completed and approved at the 1976 AGM and the Club owes a debt of gratitude to those who put so much time and effort into that document that there have been no substantive alterations since then.

Although the reason for the formation of the Tandem Club was the provision of spares and technical advice for members to help them keep old tandems on the road (in 1971 the only builder of tandems in the UK was Jack Taylor, and he was no longer using the older fittings), members' thoughts soon turned to events, both touring and racing.

Next time – the Club begins to put on events and the membership starts to grow.



Peter Hallowell, Ros Hallowell, Peter Weeks



The Spares Service

Thinking about the Tandem Club (TC) it seems sensible to tell the story as a number of themed tales over the last 50 years rather than as a chronological list covering all aspects of the club.

As covered in chapter 1 the main reason the TC was formed was to facilitate the maintenance of old tandems by the provision of spares and advice, so it seems only correct to start with the spares service. To understand this fully it is necessary to understand the situation in 1971. Apologies to all those members who know this history but it is necessary background information for everyone else.

In 1971 the vast majority of tandems in the country had been built before WWII and almost all those built after WWII still used the same oversized components. The only firm still building tandems was The Taylor Brothers (better known as Jack Taylor) and by 1971 it had stopped using those parts.

So what parts am I talking about? There are the tandem parts not used on a solo: front eccentric, rear handlebar stem for the stoker's bars and, optionally, a heel operated attachment for a rear drum brake. And there are those items using oversized parts: front handlebar extension, headset and bottom brackets. It is worth remembering that these oversized parts were, in fact, the original size when fittings were first standardised. It was only later that the standard solo parts changed to smaller sizes.

It had been a long time, perhaps pre-war, since any of these items had been made, so they were very hard to find. In case some of you are not aware the size differences were as follows: a tandem fork column was 1" internal diameter and 1½" external (solos are ⅞" internal and 1" external); tandem bottom brackets used ⅝" ball bearings (solos use ¼") and therefore required different axles and larger diameter cups.

Incidentally this change from ⅝" to ¼" bearings explains the step in a standard solo cotttered axle. The axle diameter and hence the size of the hole in a cotttered crank had been determined by the use of ⅝" ball bearings and it was obviously sensible to keep the axle the same diameter when ¼" bearings became standard so that all the existing cranks could still be used. So the new axles were made with a small step to accommodate the change in bearing size.

What did the Tandem Club do to solve these problems? The first step was to try to find unused stock in old cycle shops. This was successful but was only a short term solution. Long term we had to either have parts made or find other more imaginative solutions.

The easiest problem to solve was the front eccentric. Have an eccentric made which took a standard solo axle and cups. You could then fit any standard solo bottom bracket, cotttered or cottterless, – problem solved. I cannot remember

whether we used the same supplier as Jack Taylor or not. As eccentrics are now a standard item available through the cycle trade they no longer feature in the club spares.

Also easy to solve was the lack of 1" front handlebar extensions. This was fortunate as it was an item that seemed to have disappeared from all shops before the TC was formed. The simplest solution was to sleeve the tandem fork column to accept a solo handlebar extension. Although many people would be able to supply this themselves – the fork column off any old solo forks is the correct size – this was and still is available from the club. The club also offered a replacement fork column – tandem outside and solo internal dimensions.

The stem for the stoker's handlebars was more problematical, as different tandems with different stokers required different length stems. Initially the club had several different lengths and sizes (for different handlebar diameters) made, but perhaps the most useful was the clip that accepted a standard solo handlebar extension. This gave a full range of positions for the stoker's handlebars and was particularly useful for putting the handlebars of junior stokers within their reach. The need for all these items disappeared with the introduction of A-headsets as there is no essential difference between a modern solo handlebar clip and that required for the stoker's handlebars.

What to do about the rear bottom bracket? The club offered two options once the correct parts were no longer available. It should be noted that the standard tandem rear bottom bracket was $\frac{1}{4}$ " wider than a solo one so the axle needed to be $\frac{1}{4}$ " wider between the shoulders of the ball races.

The club was able to offer solo axles that were wide enough and these could be used with $\frac{5}{16}$ " cups and 7.5mm ball bearings to produce a reasonably efficient system.

The better, much more elegant and permanent solution was to convert the rear bottom bracket to standard solo sizing. The first task was to have $\frac{1}{8}$ " taken off each side of the bottom bracket to convert it to solo size. Any small engineering firm with a flatbed lathe could do this, though I did hear of members who did it using a grinding wheel on a hand-drill – not something I ever fancied. The next step was to fit the sleeves that the club had had made – one left hand and one right hand. The outer thread of the sleeve was the same as used by $\frac{5}{16}$ " cups and the inner thread was standard solo for $\frac{1}{4}$ " cups. Once fitted (brazed or loctited in) you could fit any chainset you desired.

The final essential item was the headset. The standard tandem headset was a Brampton clip type that fitted the $1\frac{1}{8}$ " fork column. There was also a similar, but incompatible, Chater Lea version. The club offered at least two solutions. If you replaced the tandem fork column with a solo one the club could provide the requisite sleeves to enable you to fit a solo headset. Far better, the club had replacement Brampton headsets manufactured and all the individual parts are still available from the club.

The last item that I mentioned at the beginning is the heel operated hub-brake assembly. All the parts are still available from the club. Some old tandems had a brazed on fitting beneath the boom tube so that you did not need a bolt-on clip. The main problem with the club's offering is that the bolt on clip only fits a circular tube not an elliptical one. Not an insoluble problem. One of the most attractive features of this fitting is that it can be applied via a cable from a standard brake lever or via the foot pedal.

One feature of the spares service that I have not mentioned so far, because it is relevant to solos as well as tandems, is relining hub brakes. Not surprisingly this is not something in which the club has ever engaged, as it is a specialised service, but we have always been able to advise members where to go when brakes need relining. See the club website for the latest information.

Finally, one other item that featured very prominently in the spares service for many years was 13 gauge spokes. Wheels, particularly rear ones, were a constant source of problems in early TC days. On reflection this was probably due to rims not being as strong then: today's box-section rims are much stronger than what was then available. 13 gauge spokes overcame the problems caused by weak rims and the club stocked a wide range of lengths to accommodate all sorts of different rim and hub combinations. Over the ensuing years the arrival of stronger rims and the availability of 13-14 single butted spokes made plain 13 gauge spokes unnecessary. The single butted spokes, as well as building a better wheel than plain gauge ones, also meant that rim spoke holes did not have to be enlarged to accommodate the larger spoke nipples.

If you look at the spares available from the club today most of what I have discussed here are no longer there because they are no longer required. However, it is instructive to consider why that is the case. The TC was formed at a very low point in tandem popularity and the TC was instrumental in reversing that trend. So much so that it was not too long before a major player, Dawes, started making tandems and it was soon followed by smaller, specialist builders such as Mercian and Roberts. Obviously these companies were only going to use readily available parts and the arrival of the mountain bike led to an explosion of good quality spares which were quickly absorbed by both the tandem and the touring community. But the main reason why spares play such a small part in the life of the TC today is that the service has been a victim of its own success. Although there were many tandems in 1971 that needed refurbishment it was still only a finite number and the solutions provided by the TC were either of a permanent – once in a bicycle's lifetime – nature or so effective that they were going to last for such a long time that the demand for spares was guaranteed to fall away to almost nothing. I am sure that there are still barn finds out there waiting to be discovered and restored but they must be few and far between.

Finally, I am sure there are omissions and errors in the above. Please let me have your thoughts.

Peter Hallowell



The Tandem Club Journal

As already repeated ad nauseam, the main reason for the formation of The Tandem Club (TC) was the provision of spares to enable existing tandems to be maintained/refurbished so that they could be ridden. Like any other well-run cycling club the officers elected at the inaugural meeting immediately addressed the problem of communicating with its members and issued an appeal for a volunteer to become magazine editor. Martin Smith stepped forward and was appointed. The first issue of The Tandem Club Journal (TCJ) appeared in January 1972 – not too bad for a three month old organisation.

Hiccups in the system, postal losses actually, delayed the second issue until May 1972 since when it has appeared every two months eventually settling on the even numbered ones. As stated in Chapter 1, the Essex DA was heavily involved with early issues of the TCJ with Ronnie Brown doing the typing of the stencils for four or more years. In 1974 the TC purchased its own duplicator which was installed at Martin's house from where the whole operation, except the typing, was carried out. Later the duplicating and despatch was taken on by Bob & Audrey Tinley, initially in Solihull later Coventry, before moving on to Martin Brampton in Kirbymoorside where a considerable degree of automation to the process was introduced including the use of a word processor, automated collation and computerised labels, all highly necessary as the print run had grown from 150 for TCJ1 to 1650 by TCJ60.

Martin Smith retired as editor, to become club secretary after the January 1982 issue TCJ60, and the job was taken on by Martin Brampton so everything was then being done under one roof. It is hard to exaggerate the importance of Martin Smith's work as editor of the TCJ for the first ten years of the club's existence. As there was no ubiquitous internet by which the club could keep in touch with its members, TCJ was the only practical means of communication available. I do not think anyone ever knew just how much of those early issues Martin himself wrote or even how many different pen-names he used but I think that most of the stories that appeared were his work. The most obvious difference in TCJ content today compared with then is probably that those early issues had more fiction, more technical information and fewer touring articles. Exactly what you would expect given the need to help members solve the technical problems that abounded then.

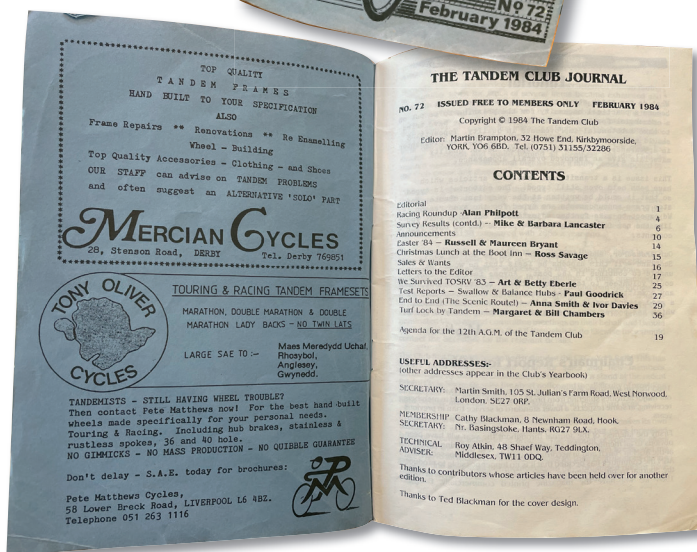
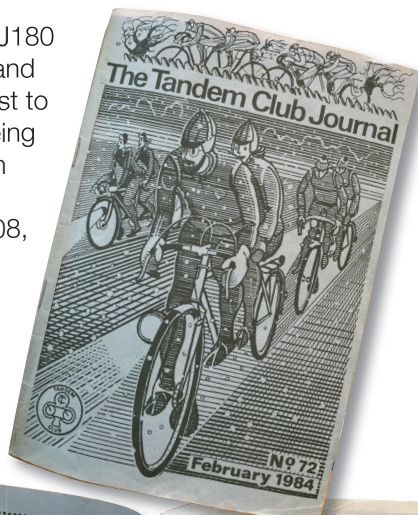
During Martin Bampton's editorship, TCJ changed from in house to commercial printing with TCJ72, the February 1984 issue. His last issue was TCJ77, in December 1984, after which he handed over to Keith & Carol Buck who produced TCJ78 to TCJ102, from February 1985 to February 1989. Issues from April 1989, TCJ103 to April 1992, TCJ121 were edited by Geoff & Avis Sleath who handed over to John Barton for issue TCJ122, June 1992. I would like to have written John & Carol Barton but I think that Carol was far too busy producing the best clothing that the TC has ever offered to get involved very deeply in TCJ.

John edited TCJ for 10 years finishing with TCJ180 in February 2002. Richard Whiteley took over and his first issue, TCJ181 in April 2003 was the first to printed on a high gloss paper similar to that being used today. Richard's last issue was TCJ206 in June 2006 with Linda Bailey taking over from TCJ207 in August 2006. The next issue TCJ208, October/November 2006, was the first to use the double month dating system on the cover that has continued ever since. Linda's last issue was TC239, December/January 2012.

This completes the story to date as our current editors, Bob & Karon Bending, took up the reins with TCJ240 in February/March 2012.

To have had only eight editors in 50 years is, I think, a great tribute to their work and to the warmth and affection that the TC generates in its members. The story of the TCJ is one of evolution not revolution and although TCJ1 and TCJ300, when it appears, look very different there is more in common between them than there are

differences. The journey from an in house duplicated magazine to a glossy professional looking magazine has had little effect on its content or style.



Rides/Events/Rallies

Rides/events/rallies call them what you will but no sooner had the TC been formed than members were organising events for the benefit of their fellow tandem riders. TCJ1 included details of the first two to be held in 1972 – an April weekend at Ilam Hall YH, organised by Roger Allen, and the Whitsun Weekend at Holmbury St. Mary YH, organised by John Keane. Both events included evening slide shows as well as daytime rides. Neither of these events were what today would be called national events as they were independently organised without reference to the committee but were advertised in TCJ.

This form of one day or weekend event organisation continued for many years. It was particularly well suited to the small number of members in those days and only died away many years later as the membership grew and became large enough to support regional groups.

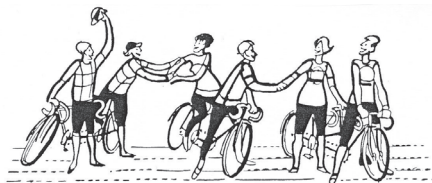
The first national event organised through the committee was Easter 1973 at Crickhowell YH and was followed the same year by an August BH meet at Bala YH. Whereas the Easter Rally has been a near permanent fixture on the TC calendar ever since, the August BH event never achieved the same success, probably due to being in summer holiday time, and only a few were held. The other permanent fixture on the calendar has been the AGM weekend which was originally a separate event but more recently combined with the Easter Rally.

Another event that was very popular for several years was New Year. As this was hardly the time for most people to camp it was always held at a YH. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly why this popular event disappeared from the calendar but I think it was mainly due to YHA making it difficult for clubs like the TC to book hostels and the way the prices increased.

The term 'National Event' was first used in 1979 for the inaugural annual rally marketed as Tandem '79 and Tandem 'XX in later years. The idea of an annual rally came from the CTC Centennial Celebrations of 1978. As one of the events to mark 100 years of the CTC Jim Willis, a member of Coventry DA, thought that it would be good idea to attract 100 tandems to Meriden to ride a 100km course. In fact he attracted well over 100 tandems and everyone enjoyed a scenic route around Meriden, very well marshalled by the local DA members. So at the end some of us said, "What is the date for next year?" To which Jim replied, "You will have to organise it yourselves." So we did and it has continued every year since, circumstances allowing. It expanded from a one day event to two days at Malton in 1982, to a longer weekend at Corbridge in 1990 and finally to a week to celebrate the club's silver jubilee at Reaseheath in 1996.

For 1989 Ian Grout suggested to the committee that the club should extend its horizon to a foreign rally and so the first International Tandem Rally was organised at Mersault in Burgundy. So successful was it that it has been on the calendar every year since even if, like the Easter Rally and Tandem 'XX (NTR), it has, some years, had to be cancelled due to diseases such as Foot & Mouth and Covid-19.

We now have three national annual events, Easter, Tandem 'XX and ITR, with most other rides being organised by the Regional Groups, the development of which will be the subject of a future chapter.



Peter Hallowell